OUR FAITH

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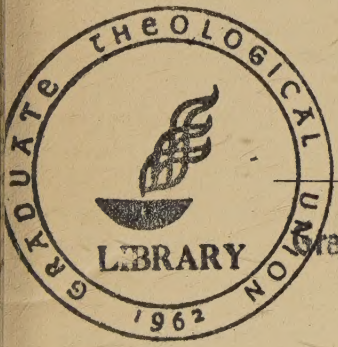
OUR FAITH

BY

W. G. TARRANT, B.A.



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PREFACE

THIS little book is meant for young people and others who have had hitherto no time or opportunity for a careful study, as distinct from the practice, of religion. It seeks to present OUR FAITH in its clearest and most definite form; and, at the same time, to indicate its relation to the general religious life of mankind. It is not, however, wholly or even chiefly concerned with matters of history, still less with dogmatic theology. The writer has tried to lead the mind to earnest self-examination and original thought, and with this view has ventured here and there to use words of direct appeal to the reader; but this is not done in any magisterial spirit, for both writer and reader are scholars in the great School of Life, where he is the happiest who helps another most.

W. G. T.

London, *September*, 1899.

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I.—THE TEMPLES AND CHURCHES OF MANY LANDS.

LET us visit in thought the great cities of the world. If, as is likely, we have seen only one or two of them, many others have been described to us in books by the travellers who act as eyes for the rest of mankind. As we picture them to ourselves one after another, we observe that, very different as they are in architecture and arrangement, all the cities have certain features in common. We may not be able to understand the speech of the citizens, but as we look at their streets we can understand a good deal of their life.

Thus, if we observe the general run of buildings in any city, we find—without the least surprise—that they include *dwelling-places* where families, rich or poor, gather into homes; *working-places* where things of use or ornament are made; and *places of business* for the sale or interchange of goods. The style of the homes,

the scale of the manufactories, or of the shops and offices of the traders, may be unfamiliar to a visitor used to only one form of city life. But even in the most unfamiliar towns no sensible man needs to look twice in order to discover what uses such buildings as these were meant to serve. There are, then, some ways of men, some aspects of human existence, which are represented more or less fitly in every city; in other words, certain needs common to all men, and efforts intended to satisfy those needs, are traceable wherever men go.

Everyone will see that, however widely men's homes may differ, a home is a home, all the world over. Whether it be a bamboo hut, or a cosy English cottage, or a luxurious mansion, everyone knows what the dwelling-place is intended to supply, for everyone feels the need which it does supply. Something of the same kind might be said of the other common aspects of city life; they are seen to be essentially alike, however different the buildings may be which represent them in different countries. Bearing this in mind we are prepared to find that in every considerable city there must be a place, or places,

where the *public business* of the community is attended to; there are offices of local government, courts of justice, and probably places for the punishment of offenders against the law. For order, government and law, are just as necessary to a city's life as trade is; indeed, there could be no trade if there were no law, no common understandings to regulate the conduct of the traders. People in our country, at any rate, also expect to find in their cities schools and other institutions for *teaching*, and if this kind of building were absent we should say that the citizens had missed one of the most important things in their common life. Still another type of city life is found in buildings and enclosures specially arranged to afford recreation and amusement to the workers after their hours of toil. Probably you can, with but little trouble, discover other marks of man's social life, things in which, just as in those mentioned, we trace the common and apparently inevitable needs and aims of mankind.

Now this is the point I wish specially to emphasize. This universal branching out of civilization into the common forms of home-life,

trade, government, law, education, even amusement, tells us something of what man's nature is. If you could come upon a city where such things were unknown or unrepresented, you would have good cause indeed to feel yourself a stranger there; but the supposition that men could live together in a community and not feel the needs I have spoken of, or take steps to supply them, is really absurd. We are sure that, the more civilized, *i.e.* the more *human* men become, the more certainly their life assumes not only these forms, but others of a higher and finer type still. For you know that in any great European or American city the inquiring visitor will soon see the signs of organised care for the sick, the insane and the poor. He will find institutions meant to encourage the homely but highly important virtues of thrift and cleanliness. We should be astonished, as already said, if any considerable community in our land did not possess, also, institutions for the mental and moral elevation of the inhabitants, so that each may become a true 'manly man,' as well as a profitable worker. We should rightly reproach such an unenlightened city with being blind to its best opportunities. All these institutions reveal

something of what man feels he and his fellow-men are, or ought to be.

But, now, you must have already reflected that in suggesting some of the common aspects of the city's life I have omitted to mention one kind of building which is not only represented in some form or other in every city of the world—whether in the strenuous West or the dreamy East—but which presents, as a rule, quite the most striking architectural feature of the streets and squares. Go into London or Paris, or Rome, or Constantinople, or Bombay; or go to the great communities of the New World, north or south, or to the capitals of the colonies,—what are these statelier buildings, amid the general masses of the city, these buildings whose towers and domes rise high above the din and bustle of the streets, and which are rich or fantastic within and without with carving and sculpture and colour? No fabrics are made in them, no buying and selling goes forward there; but the citizens, old and young, gather there from time to time with graver looks than usual, and they listen there to solemn voices and solemn strains of music, and watch the performance of rites and ceremonies

often strange and mysterious. These are the *temples*, *sanctuaries*, *churches* of the city; they are found in some form or other in every land. And, as a rule, it will be seen that the citizens hold them of high importance. They are generally costly structures; love as well as money and labour is spent on them; and who is such a stranger in a strange city as not to know that any rude behaviour of his in those sacred precincts will wound very deeply the feelings of the worshippers and provoke them to serious, even passionate, resentment?

Clearly it is no accident, no fashionable freak, that has added the *church* to the typical institutions of the city. Nor is the instinct that reared the church, the instinct of reverence and worship, a mere peculiarity of city life. Inquiry finds that even when men are only half-civilized, when they live as wandering tribes, or in the precarious settlements of many tropical regions, so that they do not attain to the status of city life in respect to many things, there are nevertheless feelings at work in the hearts of the wanderers which are identical with those that lead to the building of churches and temples. Everywhere, unless it may be where man is little more than animal, every-

where that men worthy of the name are found, they show themselves to be moved by these most remarkable feelings, which are as natural to them as hunger and thirst, and which move them as inevitably, and as fruitfully, as their desires for gain, for power, for security, or any other common end.

We call these feelings which seek expression in church, or temple, or mosque, or pagoda, the *Religious Feelings*. Most people, it may be hoped, know in some degree what these feelings are, just as men in general know what a home is. In the midst of their passing pleasures and pains men are seized with an abiding *wonder* at life and the world around them. Their wonder is sometimes joyous, as when the heavens are glorious by day or night, or the sea is beautiful, or the hills and valleys rejoice in spring-time. It is sometimes a troubled wonder, as when the storm comes down and smites them and their handiwork, and destroys their fruits and crops; or when disease afflicts them, or death breaks the home-circle. Men cannot help such wondering. Whether they suffer and are afraid, or enjoy with hope and trust, they feel, vaguely or distinctly, that there is *Something*

other than themselves, other and greater,—*Something* that is stronger, that knows more,—*Something*, too, that always is there.

Thus the religious feelings grow; and they become more powerful and filled with deeper meaning as a man becomes more conscious of his own mysterious nature. He is at one time afflicted with shame because he has done wrong; at another time, though his body may suffer pain, and his goods may be taken from him, he feels a strange exaltation of spirit, for he knows that, come what may, he has done right. What a wonderful being man is, in this wonderful world!

It is out of such experiences, such thoughts about the world around him and the world within him that man has become a religious being. We do not understand our true nature till we see how universal and how strong the instinct of worship is. Other features of city life tell us much, but not all. They tell us that man is a sociable being, with affections that find their proper play in the home-circle. So surely do they tell us this about our nature, that if some individuals could possibly be found who did not care for father or mother or child, or husband or wife, or brother or sister, nobody

would say such exceptions disproved the rule displayed in the myriads of homes in the world. The city tells us that man is a skilful being, and that he instinctively seeks to make something; that he is a commercial being, and that he inevitably seeks ways and means of interchanging what he has for what he has not; that he is sensible of the worth of order; that he feels the charms of beauty, and the delights of a cultured intellect and imagination; and that in each direction he naturally and spontaneously exerts himself to satisfy the needs he feels. Once more, let us notice, the failure of individuals here and there, or now and then, to show any of these human characteristics, cannot count against the rule overwhelmingly proved in the general experience of mankind.

With precisely the same confidence it can be asserted that to be truly human is to be religious. The degree and the character of the religiousness in different individuals may differ very greatly; but something, if only a trace, of the essential thing is there, whenever a man is truly a man. Turn where we will, to the story of the past as well as to the varieties of the

present,—we find the same testimony awaiting us. In all ages in which we can trace human society we find evidences of the instinct to worship. Does anyone say men's methods of worship have often been of a degraded kind? It must be confessed that this is sadly too true. And yet let us beware of deciding too swiftly as to the relative value of religious customs which would be entirely improper for people like ourselves to practise, or for any who have enjoyed the blessings of a wide culture of the feelings and the intellect. The lowly Asiatic who has his own private shrine, or who performs ceremonies that seem to us to have little meaning in front of the image set up, like a Romish crucifix or Madonna, in the midst of his village, is not to be judged by the standard of the educated Christian, any more than an infant's ways are to be measured by comparison with an adult's.

So when we turn to history and seek to reconstruct before our mind's eye the long ruined temples of Mesopotamia and of the valley of the Nile, or those of far-off Peru, where, all unknown to the Old World a great system of worship existed which has left its colossal monuments behind; or if we go farther

into antiquity and try to picture the wild worshippers at Stonehenge, or at any other of the stone circles that now stand gray and forlorn, but once were holy places;—in every case we shall be wise if we do not demand more than we ought. To us the rites and ceremonies of image-worshippers, whether in supplication or in praise, would be senseless or trivial, or perhaps disgusting—some of them most terrible. But we need not here discuss their character at any length. Our own duty is of more importance to us than any inquiry into the manners and customs of old; and the chief thing we have to consider in this connection is whether our own worship is worthy of the religion we profess. Our brief glance at the past may prove useful in one way, at least.

When we turn from the strange and appalling rituals practised in old time and in distant lands, and feel sad and ashamed that such things were done in the name of religion, it is clearly because we feel that something a great deal better is possible to us; and that, being possible, we must seek it, and hold it fast when found. There are also other ways in which we feel that the customs and ideas of past ages are unsuitable; and in all such cases

we know it is our duty to change them, if they have survived to our time, and to adopt those that are more suitable and becoming. It is by such discrimination that the world grows wiser all round. Sometimes people shrink from honest judgment upon old religious customs and ideas, far more than they would in regard to anything else. Certainly, there is a reverence and a modesty which we feel to be peculiarly due to religious observances ; but if religion is really to help us we must learn to think about it quite as candidly and earnestly as about other sides of our life. We need not fear that religion will be unable to bear such sincere examination, or that it will become of less value to us as we recognise the many degrees and forms in which it has appeared in men's lives. Like other aspects of life, religion was naturally very defective when man's knowledge was but rudimentary, when his powers of thought were very feeble, and right principles were hard to grasp. And even if we could trace some of the defects in religion to fraud or deception on the part of wicked and cunning men, the great thoughts and impulses of religion would remain none the less precious to mankind. For no sane person would propose to abandon all

trading, because there have been rogues; all government, because there have been tyrannical and selfish rulers; all art, because it has been sometimes misused; all medicine, because there have been ignorant quacks and impostors. The fact that there have been evils of any kind in connection with religion should only make us the more earnest to escape them, and to preserve it 'pure and undefiled.'

The springs of religion will never dry up in our nature. On the contrary, the more we become aware of the perpetual wonder of the world; the more we feel its beauty and its mystery; the more, too, we realise what a human soul's capacities are, capacities of goodness and of badness; the more we shall see how closely it is blended with our life, and with the life of everyone around us. In vain shall we seek any substitute to take its place. Could it be trade? We must, indeed, give ourselves to our business or calling in life, so as to earn our living honourably; but in our working and trading we are beset with difficulties and temptations that will overcome and defeat us, if religious principles are not at hand to direct and shelter us. We may apply ourselves to

different forms of art, or to the accomplishments that amuse mankind; but here also people often fall below their best, if not into open disgrace, for lack of the healthful principles of religion. If we give ourselves up to political affairs we shall find it difficult to avoid the snares of party or personal ambition, unless our aims and methods are held in control by a conscience enlightened by reverence, and strengthened by faithfulness to a law which is above all human laws. Even in occupations which are most innocent and good, such as scientific inquiry or the teaching of morals, we miss the finest inspirations if our efforts are not filled with an ever-renewed trust in that supreme Goodness, that eternal Truth, towards which, during long ages and in many ways, men have aspired.

'Religions are many; religion is one.' As we inquire respecting the forms of worship and the religious ideals which are worthiest and most suitable for us, we may assure ourselves that the essential part of religion is within the grasp of every sincere mind. The ancient prophet Micah well summed up the whole matter when he asked: 'What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love

mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' And Jesus summed up the whole 'law and the prophets' in terms practically the same. Let us remember this whenever we are disposed to value too highly this or that particular tradition or custom. Our usual estimate of these things is greatly influenced by the habits we inherit, or see in practice around us, and by the limits of our education and experience. We should try to judge quite reasonably, and to escape from all prejudice.

We shall need an open and candid mind in our study of the different types of religious thought. But let us gladly remember, as we proceed, how well it is for us that we have no need to travel all round the world in search of the essential part of religion. While it is interesting and instructive to pay attention to some of the chief varieties of religious 'homes' in the world, let us take care that we are not left spiritually homeless ourselves. In all that follows in this book, the main thing in view will be to describe if possible, that form of religious culture, that church and faith, which may best supply a spiritual home for us, and which will best fit us to fulfil the purposes of our life on this earth. The

full proportions of the great Faith which we are called to share will not be seen till our concluding section is reached ; but each section will serve, I hope, as a step towards this grand spiritual temple. It will be our first aim to mark out clearly the general position of 'Our Church' as compared with the other typical 'Churches' around us. Having tried to make that clear, we shall have a fixed point whence we may look with advantage and profit on the records of the world's greatest religious teachers, and particularly on those that tell us about our own great Teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. Both in regard to him and to the Bible there is a good deal of debate, and we must carefully try to find how each may most truly and beneficially affect our religious life. Meanwhile, let this truth sink into our minds, viz. :—that the Giver of Life to all men is the Spiritual Helper of all His human children. It is His influence that has made men feel that eating and drinking, and working and playing, are not all that we are here for. If the souls thus quickened will only be faithful, will only 'struggle and aspire,' the divine Guide will lead them on in the safe and right way.

II.—OUR CHURCH.

WE have so far gained something, let us hope, from our glance at the many churches and temples of mankind. We have at least learned how widespread the religious life is, how persistent all through the history of mankind, although its outward forms have been extremely various. Perhaps the fact that there is such a variety of religious culture is rather perplexing to some of us. And if we try to mark out the kind of church that we feel best for our needs, and most consistent with the teachings that are felt by us to be wisest, it may at first seem a difficult task. But, in fact, the task of determining our 'latitude and longitude,' so to speak, is comparatively easy; for already a great many forms of worship and religious thought are practically far removed from us. Although there are around us many places of worship, representing different types of thought, not one of them is

like the temples that were built in 'the times of ignorance.' No longer do men look for the slaughter of beasts or the smoke of altar fires when they gather to praise their unseen Benefactor and seek His blessing. The very suggestion of killing a *human* being in order to please God in our worship, as men used to do, would be as abominable to us as the foul practices of the Syrians were to the prophets of Israel in their day. Those things have been left behind; for men make permanent progress in religion just as they do in domestic life, in trade, in art, in government, in everything.

It is certain, however, that every step forward has needed some effort; and it is so wherever a reformer arises—be he an inventor, or an artist with new ideas, or even a merchant with novel methods of doing business,—there are sure to be people, who, knowing the worth of the old ways, and not being persuaded as to the worth of the new, oppose the suggested change. I have spoken of the prophets of old—how fiercely they were opposed in their reforms of religion we see when we read their words in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, they persisted in pursuit of the better way. That great Something which had given

them the powers of thought, that God which men worshipped in their blindness, little aware how blind they were, made these prophets faithful, not to the bidding of custom, however ancient, but to the call towards the higher and nobler things.

Now, a very important question suggests itself at this point ; and in trying to answer it we need all our wisdom, all our modesty, and all our trust in the truth. The question is this : Has the time for progress in religion all gone by, or are we also in our day called upon to do our best to find even a better way than that which our fathers reached? I say we need all our modesty here : for who are we that we should claim a clearer vision than theirs who preceded us, and to whom we owe so much ?

Let us sincerely pray to be delivered from every trace of self-conceit, especially when we are dealing with what is, or has been, sacred to other people. It is only when we feel that the truth itself compels us that we should venture upon setting aside things and thoughts long held important, and indeed, all-important. But when a man really feels that things ancient are no longer true for him, or no longer becoming

in his day and generation, he is bound in allegiance to the right and true, thus dawning upon his mind, to speak clearly and frankly against the things that are untrue, or unserviceable to our best manhood.

It is in this temper of lowly yet loyal love of the highest truth that we should look upon the forms of religious worship and conception prevalent around us. I have said that the grosser forms of ritual have been long banished. We live in a land of 'Christian worship,' *i.e.* worship as practised by those who call Christ their teacher; and from the earliest days of Christianity its adherents have often been reminded of the *spiritual* nature of all true religion. 'God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth,'—such are the memorable words of the fourth Gospel,—and they have found an echo in countless hearts since they were first uttered. To many a mind these words have occurred in the midst of scenes very different, indeed, from the simplicity with which they seem most in harmony. At such times the question arises, 'How is it that those who profess to be followers of the lowliest and simplest of teachers are now found so attached to elaborate

ceremonies, and to a greater pomp in their worship than seems consistent with a purely spiritual ideal?'

In order to find the answer to this question we have to remember that Christianity is nearly 1900 years old, and that its original adherents came from many different points of the religious compass. Many of them had been accustomed to bloody sacrifices and smoking altars; to the consecration of special places as peculiar abodes of the Divine Being; to the setting-apart of a tribe or caste of men who alone might perform religious ceremonies; while in their acts of public worship they were accustomed to many elaborate performances in which they tried to represent or *symbolize* different religious ideas. This *symbolic* feature in worship is common to all the great temples of the world; we find it clearly amongst the sculptures of Egyptian, Assyrian, and other ancient temples, as well as in the modern services of Buddhists and of Roman Catholics.

In the earlier and middle ages of Christendom the people at large were unable to read, and other means of teaching were scarce; and so the great system of *Christian Art* grew up, in which architecture, painting, sculpture, and

music were all used as means by which the ideas of Christian doctrine might be impressed on the minds of the worshippers. It is to this that we owe the pomp and beauty of some of the prevalent forms of Christian worship. The ancient churches and their modern imitations are stories and parables in stone; and the rituals and garments of the priests, often bewildering to the stranger, have each a meaning for those who understand. For many years past an agitation, more or less severe from time to time, has been going on in this country about these very things; and we read about the use of incense, and the lighting of candles, and changing of robes, and kneeling, and crossings, and ringing of bells, and many other things that seem curious enough to some of us. But they are evidently much more than 'curious' to a good many people. For on the one side there are men who would apparently rather go to prison than give them up; and on the other there are men who cannot too vehemently denounce these things as wicked and idolatrous. If we ask why such strong feelings are aroused the answer is plain; it is what these things stand for that makes them important. Men look behind the symbols to the things sym-

bolised, and, whether the outward form be to the looker-on a thing of beauty or a ridiculous trifle, it is the inward meaning that really matters.

Now, however much we deplore this strife about religion, we must rejoice as honest and truth-loving people that the mere prettiness of a service or a church is not thought sufficient by itself. Would that all remembered that! All earnest men, at any rate, feel that religion must be earnest if it is to be worth anything; these men feel *that;* and it is just *that* which has led a great many thinking people to turn away altogether from these elaborate forms of Christian worship and to seek a better and a simpler way. The church may be a pretty or even a noble building; and the ceremonies may, as spectacles, leave nothing to be desired; the music may be sweet and inspiring; and, much more than all these, the priests may be kind and devout men, diligent in many forms of benevolence; and yet, in spite of all these things, and it may be with sad feelings, earnest people feel they must seek religious culture elsewhere. They see that among the ideas symbolised and held essential

in such a church are some that are quite impossible for them to share. More than that, they feel that some of these ideas are quite unworthy of the followers of Christ, quite opposed to the clearest and noblest conceptions of the Divine nature, and that so far from seeming to hold them they must do all they can to oppose them and to point men to something better.

For example, there are many, including ourselves, who utterly disbelieve in the pretended powers of the *priest*, by which he is said to be able to do for the worshipper what he could not do for himself. Of course the weak must always look for help to the strong, and the guidance of a wise and gifted mind is a great blessing. But the claims of the priest are not based on any personal strength or wisdom or natural gifts that he may possess, but on his being properly appointed to his office and duly performing the ceremonies assigned to him. The great body of Nonconformists in this country represent the opposition to the priest-idea. They see that it is a relic of a very old superstition, and that it has been and may become again a fearful danger to the best manhood and womanhood. And so these Nonconformists raise places of worship and of

religious culture where they may be free of it. 'Our Church' is one such place of worship; we wish above all things to lead men to true spiritual freedom, and through that freedom to the highest spiritual wisdom and beauty and strength.

You will see, then, that we have already marked out a very definite position for 'Our Church.' Along with a great and increasing number of people we feel that our religious home is not with the priestly system which has travelled so far from the simplicity of Jesus Christ. But amongst those who agree in feeling this there are still some differences of thought, about which much has been said in past years—probably more than will be said again; for the essential parts of Christian teaching are felt to need so much attention that men do not care to spend time and strength upon more doubtful points. This is as it should be, but differences do exist; and I hope it will not be uncharitable to say that some of us think that many of these Nonconformists, who for two or three hundred years have been seeking to worship God more truly outside the National Church than they felt they could inside, have not quite trusted themselves to

full liberty of thinking; and so one or two very strange relics of bygone thought have lingered amongst them. I think many of them are learning, in spite of their old customs and traditions, to put these things away, and to come towards a thought of God and of Christ, and of religion generally, not very unlike that which we cherish.

Thus we arrive at a point where it will be useful to set briefly and simply before ourselves the leading principles that draw us apart from many of our brethren into the religious home that we call 'Our Church.' Remember that this and all such 'brief statements' are but like the crossing of lines upon a map, meant to give an indication of our whereabouts, but very insufficient as a picture of our whole religious life and thought. We may conveniently gather these principles into four groups, leaving, as we have said, the fuller elucidation of Our Faith to the succeeding sections of our study.

I. We believe in the entire freedom of the heart and of the mind as far as it may be attained. There are natural obstacles in the way; but at any rate we will not set up artificial ones. Prejudice and ignorance are the chief

natural hindrances to this freedom, and conscious as we must be that we are all liable to err in these directions, we desire all the more to avoid anything that should strengthen our prejudices or keep us from receiving new truth. Thus we set up no formal creed for ourselves, and we never ask anyone who wishes to join us in any part of our worship, or in any part of our church-life, first of all to give assent to any such statement of belief. We hope that in the main we are agreed, and I think we are, but being quite certain that *saying* we are agreed will not make us so if we are not, we respectfully and fraternally leave one another to conscience and the guidance of the Divine Spirit.

II. The ministers in our churches are honoured as leaders and teachers; but no one, least of all any one of themselves, thinks that they have power to work supernatural things for the church and the worshippers. While they try by special preparation to render special help in public worship and as religious teachers, they and their hearers have the same access to the Father who is worshipped, not by any necessary ceremonial, but in spirit and in truth.

III. Our general theology, *i.e.* our teaching about God, is in one way very reticent and very modest; in another way, very decided. In the first place we dare not say we understand the Divine nature so as to be able to define it,—who can presume to such a knowledge of that Mysterious ONE, whose working is everywhere in this vast Universe, in all ages? With lowliness let us adore; but let us not lose the very essence of religion in wrangling about things too hard for us. A good deal of Christian teaching has busied itself with the question of how many PERSONS there are in the Godhead. One thing is very evident to us, viz., that it is only confusing the minds of people to say Jesus was God, and yet he was sent *by* God, and prayed and sacrificed himself *to* God, and is now seated at the right hand of God. There is difficulty enough in religion; why confuse the mind with these contradictions? If people call us Unitarian on account of this, we need not think this a term of reproach, for we know that we hold the wisest conception of the ancient faith—'the Lord our God is One Lord,' and that Jesus himself emphasized this faith.

But much more important is our thought that God can be no other than completely good.

Upon this we are fully persuaded. We could not worship any other Being; and the results of this conviction are very important. We cannot, *e.g.* think of God as one who needed the cruel death of Jesus on the cross in order to forgive men their sins; and we cannot think a completely good God will keep sinners in everlasting torments (as many have said and believed) as a punishment for sins done in their earthly life.

IV. Finally, we have unbounded hopes for every soul of man if it be brought to see the truth and to practise goodness. Truth and goodness are the pure atmosphere in which spirits grow into the likeness of Him who is perfectly true and good; and so we welcome all teachers of the truth, and all who inspire us with a love of goodness. We meet as a congregation in order that we may worship and commune with Him who teaches and inspires all teachers in His own way; and our church-life is meant to foster in every way the best life of every one of us.

And so, if you wish to help others to the nobler faith, to assist in the religious progress of mankind; if you desire to grow wiser and

stronger and still to see before you the Divine Perfection drawing you ever onward, here is a Church which is meant to help you and which will help you,—so long as you will faithfully help it. So long as you will give your best to it you shall find your best in it. This is the kind of Church we offer, a home of practical faith in that Father Spirit, who, we are told, Himself 'seeks' those to be His worshippers who approach Him 'in spirit and in truth.'

III.—THE WORLD'S GREATEST TEACHERS.

IT cannot surprise anyone to observe how great a part is played in religion by instruction. People cannot dispense with instruction in the great arts of life, and they need it in their church-life as well as in business. So important, indeed, is the work of the religious teacher that the main divisions of the religious culture of mankind gather around the memory of wise and inspiring men to whom multitudes look up as the founders of their faith. The names Christian, Buddhist, Confucian, Mohammedan, and others, by which men are divided into separate religious groups carry us back to leaders of this kind. We shall find it profitable, Christians as we are, to learn something about other great teachers of mankind besides Jesus Christ; rather, we shall find it difficult, if not impossible, to understand his greatness and worth to us unless we know how

his teachings stand in relation to those of others who have won many disciples.

But before we glance at the history and work of such men, let us remind ourselves of one very important consideration. We know that in the case of every one of us life begins in ignorance. There is no one born so wise as never to need a teacher. By and by the young mind has grown able to understand things, thanks to the instruction of its elders, and at last it also becomes a teacher of still younger minds. It is by this process of learning and teaching, not only as regards matters which can be put into books but a great deal besides, that the life of mankind has gone on. The beginning of the process is far out of sight. We know that men were once ignorant of many things which are now well-known in every civilized country. They were unacquainted with the uses of materials and the processes of manufacture which are now common property. It cannot be wondered at, therefore, that they were blind to the greater facts, deaf to the greater voices of the world. Compared with their state we live in a broad daylight of knowledge and culture, and it would be an overwhelming calamity could we

be thrust back into such a condition as that of primitive mankind. But there is no danger of so disastrous an event. However slowly, mankind has been led surely out of the darkness into the light. While we rejoice in our heritage let us not fail to be grateful to the toilers and discoverers of old, and above all to that supreme *Teacher* and helper of all minds in all ages who has guided men and made them what they are.

For the story of our race bears witness to a teaching power higher than human, a steady persistent influence that has drawn onwards the tides of thought and feeling as the moon sways the tides of the sea. It is God who 'teacheth in all good things.' The truth is no man's private property; it is no device contrived by any number of men. Our minds discover it; we find one by one the meanings of things, in the realm of nature, and in our own minds and hearts. If we make mistakes, or foolishly pretend to have found out what is still hidden, the truth is in no way altered, any more than the mountain is changed by the mists and vapours that gather around its crest. For the meanings that are put into this world are God's meanings, and they cannot be really

altered by human failure or fault, they cannot be trimmed and shaped to suit our fashions and prejudices, they remain for ever faithful and sure. How wise, therefore, are the souls who before all other considerations seek what is true, and who are prepared to stake everything upon that! It is when a teacher makes us feel this devotion to truth that we know him to be the messenger of the Source of all truth.

We may here pause afresh to remind ourselves that all who teach the truth are servants of God, whether they know it or not, whether what they teach is looked upon as religious truth or not. Thus, the men who found out the uses of metals, or the ways of plants and animals, or in other ways showed men how to enrich their lives through a wise use of things, were assuredly instruments of the Giver of all good. And all who follow in their steps, extending the domain of useful knowledge from one generation to another, are no less the servants of God than they are helpers of man. They also are doing His work who minister to the well-being of the mind, helping men to think more correctly and to share pure and exalted emotions. Every honest effort to in-

crease the mental and spiritual riches of mankind is thus ennobled. Whether it be by book or by speech, by pictures or other works of beauty, or by music, or by good and useful work of any kind, all such helpfulness is glorious, for it brings others more and more towards the light of truth.

Now, we know very well that, in regard to all these things, knowledge grows; and that is no less the case as regards religious truth. No revelation flashes out without preparation, any more than noonday suddenly follows midnight. Both teachers and taught are prepared by gradual steps for what God, the great Teacher, means to show to them or through them. If Sir Isaac Newton had appeared among the ancient Druids and told them of those laws of force by which the solar system is bound together he could not have been understood. If Wordsworth had sung his 'Ode to Duty' at some feast of Saxons or Norsemen in the olden time, it must have been largely labour in vain. The path of knowledge ascends from age to age; and though there sometimes appears a discoverer or artist whose work stands out in permanent excellence through all the generations that follow him, so

that in his particular way he remains the one greatest teacher, yet a little inquiry shows that each brilliant genius was preceded by others who laboured in the same direction. If we turn to the history of any science, or of any art, abundant proofs will be found in support of this principle of gradual revelation.

Let me add one more illustration of the growth of knowledge, differing from those just mentioned. It is a singular and most important fact that there is a continued harvest of new thought from the highest works of genius, the highest products of the mind, long after the author or teacher has passed away. It would seem as if the best thoughts and conceptions of men had something so vital in them that like seeds taken into the soil of the common mind of man, they continually spring forth into unexpected richness of meaning. Thus the world's greatest poets, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, have left us a legacy that grows richer with lapse of years; and the same thing is true of the greatest geniuses in other ways.

Both kinds of growing revelation may be seen in the history of religious teaching. It began so long ago that no man can tell when.

No date can be named for so momentous a beginning, but we know that whenever men began to wonder, to fear, to trust, to be faithful, religion was begun. It is a very long way thence to the time of any of the great teachers whose names are held in veneration by mankind. If we call these men '*founders* of religion' it must be, therefore, in a special sense of the word. The fact is, unfamiliar though it may be, that in every case these men were at first 'reformers' of religion, as it had come down to their day. There is no violent break anywhere, however grand the advance may be which we owe to this teacher or that. The importance of this consideration will appear more particularly when we speak of him who is our special Teacher, as well as the importance of this other consideration, viz., that his teachings are of that highest order where successive generations find deeper and richer meanings. Our first step, however, after taking this view of the part played by teaching in the general progress of mankind, and the conditions under which it works, will be to note very briefly the chief facts about some others who are deservedly reckoned among the world's greatest teachers.

One of the most important of these is *Moses*, who is claimed by the Jews as the 'founder' of their faith. If we remind ourselves that Christianity is an offshoot from the Jewish religion we shall see how great an interest his life and work possesses for us. About every-one of the great teachers a vast number of books has been written, and the story of Moses and the extent of his religious work still form the subject of careful study by our ripest scholars. Of course we cannot here examine this subject in detail; but there is less reason to sketch his history,—as it is generally conceived,—because most people know it pretty well from their Bible. That he lived fourteen or fifteen centuries before Christianity, that he led a revolt of the Hebrews against the Egyptians who had enslaved them, that while he and his people wandered in the Sinai peninsula he laid the foundation of a system of worship and of law for his people, and that shortly after his death the wandering tribes began to settle in the villages and towns of Canaan,—such is the outline of the story. It is, probably, most useful for us to remember that Moses is looked upon as the giver of the Decalogue, or 'Ten Commandments' to his people; and, if he was so,

we see that his reform was directed towards purifying the popular worship from the evils of idolatry, and no less towards building up a system of sound and wholesome moral life. The Jews have always looked up to him as the prophet who taught them that the divine being is One God,—a truth that took a long time to win its way amid the ancient peoples among whom the Jews lived, but one which is now held by intelligent worshippers everywhere.

Eastward of the land of the Jews, in that part which we now call Persia, another teacher has been for many centuries honoured as the founder of the religion cherished there. We are not sure of the time when he lived, nor do we really know his name, for that by which he is known—*Zoroaster*—seems to mean 'chief priest.' He may have lived as long ago as Moses; but even if so, he found an old form of religion practised around him, and one which he felt unworthy of himself and his countrymen. This old religion is still very largely cultivated in India, under the name of Brahminism; and though it has no doubt been modified in the course of ages, it is still so much the same as in Zoroaster's day, that we can under-

stand very well the kind of reform which he began. In the older religion the form of life which was most commended was that of pious meditation. The Brahmins thought themselves absolved from practical work if they devoted their days to prayer to the gods. With plain good sense Zoroaster rebuked all that sort of thing. He taught men that they did not exist merely to pray to the gods and practise time-honoured ceremonies; each man had his duties to perform in the world as a worker and producer. He would keep the sacred fire, the symbol of the deity, burning on the altar; that was truly for him the most sacred place; but the next was the home where a man cherishes wife and children, and the third the field where he sows and reaps. Thus he taught the practical side of religion, that good work is a kind of worship, and one which is more acceptable than lifeless rituals. No wonder that his teachings were preserved, and that out of them and around them grew one of the Scriptures, the Sacred Books, of mankind.

At the far east of the Old World, in China, another teacher with a very practical turn of mind won for himself the undying veneration

of his countrymen. His name is familiar to people of the West in its Latinised form *Confucius*. He lived about five hundred years before Christ; about the time, that is, when the Jews were returning from their captivity in Babylon. So little was Confucius given to theological speculation that his reform was apparently as much political as religious, yet it profoundly affected the life and worship of multitudes from that time to this. Like Zoroaster, he saw that men were too much disposed to neglect the duties and opportunities which came to them. In their ignorance and fear they prayed to this spirit or that; but their prosperity lay not in magical charms and religious rites duly performed, but in learning the truth and living in accord with their knowledge. An intense moral passion possessed him. He would neither speak a lie, nor perform one. He stood for absolute justice, between ruler and subjects, between citizens, between employer and employed. What he undertook he did; and when he was appointed to some office under government he was keen to see that others did what they had undertaken. His chief trouble was that men still deceived themselves and thought that they could somehow

get good without being good. He passed away feeling sad at heart over this moral stupidity; but he had not lived and taught in vain. His maxims were preserved by reverent disciples, and in course of time another sacred Book was added to the world's literature, representing his wisdom and influence.

A little later than the time of Confucius saw a fresh reform begun in that Brahminism which Zoroaster had tried to reform. The reformer this time achieved far more celebrity than fell to the lot of his remote predecessor. His name was *Gautama*, but he is more often spoken of as the Buddha, *i.e.* the 'enlightened one' (just as Jesus of Nazareth is spoken of as the Christ, *i.e.* the 'anointed one'). Gautama Buddha, we are told, was born in the fifth century before Christ. His family connections were princely, and he might have lived in ease and comfort. But being filled with pain and perplexity by the miseries of men and women around him, his heart yearned to discover a way of escape for them from such evils. The traditional religion of his country gave him no help in his perplexity; he tried the Brahminical way of piety, but all in vain. At last he perceived, as

Zoroaster and Confucius had done,—and as we may perceive to-day, unhappily—that people, even when professedly religious, commonly prefer the sluggish way to the strenuous one; they will rather go on imitating the established customs of their ancestors than take the trouble to think; they will rather indulge in dreams of miraculous aid than they will up and do what they can do and ought to do for themselves and others. Thus the light dawned on Gautama Buddha, that the way to escape the evils which afflict mortals is the way of personal virtue and the culture of universal pity and goodwill. Such earnest wisdom and gentle love breathed in his words and life that he became the subject of intense admiration and affection. A wealth of stories grew up about his memory, and in the devout imagination of millions he, who taught men least about God, has been elevated into a deity himself.

Passing by names of less significance in the history of religious education there is one more, besides that name which is dearest to Christians, which ought to be mentioned here; for it is the name of one whose influence has spread very widely and has in very important ways

affected the history of our race. I refer to *Mohammed*, the Arab, who nearly thirteen centuries ago, in the midst of the Dark Ages of Christendom became a prophet and teacher to his people. After a long period of ignorance and prejudice, Christian writers are beginning to do justice to the religious reform which he set on foot, and to realise how much some of his followers did for science and civilization. It is well that this should be so, for we are only hindering the path of progress and the revelation of the fuller truth when we accept false or inadequate conceptions of any great teacher. It is clear that Mohammed, like the other reformers of whom we have spoken, tried to get people to give up all shams and mere conventionalities in connection with religion. He was terribly in earnest. The truth which he learned from Moses and which he felt in his own heart—that God is One—must not, he felt, be obscured by the idolatrous customs of his people; nor could he be patient with the forms of Christian worship which were current in the East at that time. To him the Christians seemed to have many deities, and to proclaim doctrines subversive of the eternal righteousness of God. With fiery vehemence he de-

nounced every form of falseness, and insisted that the Eternal One would judge righteous judgment upon all men according to their works. 'Be true,' he would say, 'for God is true.' 'There is only one thing to fear; fear God, and fear nothing else.' With such thoughts burning in his heart and bursting from his lips it is not wonderful that, in an age when Christianity itself was warlike and violent in its methods, Mohammed became a fighting prophet and the Mohammedans became an army of soldiers devoted to the spread of the new faith by the power of the sword.

In the case of Mohammed, as in the case of Gautama Buddha, sacred writings came to play an important part in the new form of religion. We have seen that it was so in the case of the other reformers. With respect to these sacred writings something more will be said further on. What we have tried to do in this section of our study is to catch, if possible, the leading notes of the messages given by these great teachers of religion. Many other features of an interesting and important kind might be presented in the case of each religious movement; but we may be well contented at present if we have at all correctly understood the

motive power of each reform as it originally arose. In the later history of every religious movement we find much that has become attached to the original idea of its founder. In some cases there has been a real improvement, or at least a useful modification and adaptation introduced by gifted men who have followed the leader with an earnest and intelligent spirit. In others there has been far more departure in wrong directions. Sects and parties have broken off not for any real practical ends, but from personal reasons, and in pursuance of ideals and customs often very different indeed from the aims of the founders. The disciples have not meant to depart from the lessons bequeathed to them; on the contrary, they have generally paid the greatest reverence to the memory of their teacher, and have exalted him till, as in the case of Gautama, some of them have deified him. Thus the ancient wisdom comes down in a stream intermingled with much unwisdom, and the task of the true disciple is to inquire earnestly into the fundamental truths of the religion in which he is brought up. Such an inquiry, if candidly made, will reveal to Christians, no less than to the followers of any other teacher, that

Christendom has in many ways deplorably strayed from the wise 'simplicity of Christ.' In the next section we shall try to see what his teachings were in their essence, and we shall then be able to see for ourselves where to choose amid the mingled elements which are presented to us as Christian teaching to-day.

IV.—JESUS OF NAZARETH.

OF all the great teachers of mankind none has had such a powerful, such a good influence as Jesus of Nazareth. We count our years from the supposed date of his birth, as if indeed the world's history began afresh with his life. His great influence arises partly out of the things which he taught, but also out of his own character and personality. We cannot understand the meaning and history of Christianity unless we remember what Jesus was, as well as what Jesus said. In reality, every teacher's influence depends a good deal on what the teacher is himself. It is so especially when his teaching concerns the moral and spiritual life of those whom he seeks to instruct. A known bad man cannot create in us a love of goodness any more than a 'dead' match can kindle a fire. But it was just to set men burning with intense longings to be good,

and to show them how the holy flame could be fed until all evil should be consumed out of their souls, that Jesus became a teacher and left lessons of wisdom for us to learn.

The God of eternal wisdom by whose influence and inspiration human beings have grown in wisdom from the first ages till now, has many things for us to learn; and different portions of the whole truth are given by different servants of His. It did not fall to Jesus of Narazeth to uncover the secrets of the physical world for us; he was no inventor of useful tools; he was no artist skilled to embody conceptions of beauty either in colours, shapes, tones, or verses. All such things, in as far as they are good at all, are part of God's teaching to our minds; and we should be alike grateful in receiving them from others, and faithful in rendering them to others should that duty be assigned to us. The teaching which Jesus had to impart to mankind was of a special character, and had its limits. He might have travelled farther and seen more, he might have lived longer and learned more; but the limits of his life and knowledge did not prevent him from understanding the deepest things of the human soul. It was about these things that

he had to teach; not about the conveniences of life, but life itself. It was about what men really are, and what this world means, or may mean, to them. In such a case we want above all things a teacher who knows by experience what he would have us know and feel. Hence the great importance to us of the character and personality of Jesus. It is not enough for a reader to find some splendid thoughts and home-truths set down upon a printed page, or for a listener to hear them repeated as anonymous echoes from long ago. We want to know who and what kind of man he was who said them, whether he struck others as a lovable and wise man, and whether his own life was anything like the ideal that his teachings hold up to us.

Now, when we ask such questions about Jesus of Nazareth, whose teachings are preserved for us in the New Testament, we are happily able to find a good deal that will help us and reassure us as to his life and character. By the aid of these records I must try to sketch, as faithfully as I can, an outline portrait of that great life. We must warn ourselves, however, at the outset, how easily we

may make mistakes in every attempt of the kind. I have used the word 'portrait,'—it suggests as an illustration an interesting fact connected with the life of one of the world's greatest poets. William Shakespeare was living in London 300 years ago, and his plays were already so popular that they brought him considerable fame and prosperity. And yet we have to confess that but little is known with certainty as to his doings, and the true likeness of his face is left in much doubt. There are some old pictures of him, and a coloured bust in Stratford Church, where his earthly remains were buried; but even these oldest sources of information differ considerably and it is not easy to decide as to the most trustworthy. Of later likenesses and pictures there are an infinite number, and everybody knows what we call the 'conventional' likeness of Shakespeare; the only thing is that these modern pictures that glorify the poet so much are clearly imaginary for the most part and must be very carefully used, or even set aside altogether, by one who is in search of the true conception. So with regard to the conception of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. He lived 1900 years ago, and in

that period busy minds have imagined all kinds of pictures both of his face and of his mind. Some of these we are sure we may set aside at once, such as those figures and paintings which represent him on the one hand as a majestic person who trod the earth like an imperial sovereign, or on the other, as a wretched, weak person clearly defective in intellect and all the manlier qualities. With equal confidence we feel we may reject some of the images of his *mind*, which have been set up and worshipped, or feared, by superstition and ignorance.

We turn then, chiefly, if not solely, to the New Testament, when we are seeking the picture of the real Jesus. Even there, as in the case of the more ancient portraits of our great English poet, we find room for the exercise of most careful judgment. For in the four Gospels that preserve his words and outline his life we find at least two very well marked types, both as to his words and as to his deeds. One type is given in the first three Gospels, and another in the fourth. Even in the first three there are differences; and as regards the fourth it is felt generally by all competent scholars that the writer

intended by it to tell us how he interpreted the life and teaching of Jesus rather than to give a plain and unbiassed historical account of them. So it is clear that we must be content if in regard to some things reported we can only say at best what is probable, or even if in regard to others we must confess them entirely uncertain.

But do not mistake me. I said that we are happily able to find a good deal that will help us and reassure us as to the life and character of Jesus. This is made more certain to us when we remember that the New Testament contains, besides the Gospels, other writings, chiefly letters by St. Paul and other Christians of the first century; and that these bear witness in an unmistakable way to the deep and lasting impression which he had made upon men's hearts and minds. As to his words, indeed, these writings tell us little or nothing; for them we must go to the varied collections of sayings preserved in the Gospels; but those early Christians were so clearly filled with awe and reverence, and yet with passionate love, for Jesus, that we can without doubt infer that his was a holy and beautiful nature, and one that fitly illustrated

the most exalted teachings of religious truth. Sometimes when we cannot see the sun itself, we catch the reflection of its light from the upper clouds. So the children in a family will often reflect in later years the influence, still remaining with them, of the strong intellect of the father, or the gentle wisdom of the mother. So the pupils of a great artist reflect his manner and reproduce his ideas. And thus the beauty and glory of the great Teacher's nature are shown in the light that shines in the lives that turned, as it were, towards him in the days when his memory was fresh and vivid.

I think that all this furnishes us with much guidance and assistance as we deal with the fragmentary materials preserved in the gospels. And our task will be much simplified if we ask what special teachings have made Jesus so dear to the memory of mankind. Some of them, and I believe the most important of them, can be seen at a glance; though it will take long meditation indeed to penetrate to the full depth of their meaning. Let us see what they were, tracing meanwhile the simple story of his career.

Jesus comes at once before us as a religious reformer. A strange and gifted man named John the Baptist—whose title arose from his practice of dipping in pure water those who welcomed his teaching and wished to live a pure and holy life—had already set on foot a new religious movement in the land of Palestine. Jesus was baptized by him and followed in his footsteps. We know little with certainty as to the youth of Jesus, but we may safely infer that he shared the usual religious education of young Jews, and that he deeply felt the truths which it was designed to impress. He evidently grew up familiar with the customs and literature of his race, for though of humble parentage—his father was a carpenter—he, like all the sons of Israel, was taught to cherish these heirlooms of his people, and to feel that God had specially revealed Himself to the Israelites of old. As he grew in the obscurity of Nazareth, a small country town in the northern part of Palestine, far away from the splendour and the temptations of great cities, his mind grew in simple strength, unspoiled by the fashions of the world,—even of the religious world, which also has fashions only too injurious to man's healthier instincts.

It was natural, therefore, that he should feel drawn towards the teaching of John, which apparently partook of a stern character, but whose severity was that of the law of justice and morality; and that his mind was so thrilled with the hope of a great new age of the world in which God's righteousness would rule supreme that, when John himself was silenced in prison, he resolved to carry on his work.

It was, however, not only a new voice that proclaimed the coming 'Kingdom of God.' There were new and very beautiful changes of method in his teaching, and strange new thoughts that affected men's minds much more than anything they had heard from any other teacher. He did not confine himself, hermit-like, in the wilderness, to be sought out by would-be converts. He sought them out instead. From village to village, from town to town he went, addressing the people wherever they would assemble—by the wayside, or on the shores of the sea of Galilee, or among the hills, or in his own hired house at Capernaum, or in the houses of the friendly or the curious, or in the synagogue, the ordinary place of public worship. Every place was fit where there were listeners, minds to be instructed,

hearts to be appealed to. He recalled men from the careful and often burdensome observance of religious ceremonies and customs, in which the Jews were pre-eminent, to the real purpose and end of all religious worship and culture, which is *the perfecting of human character.*

In the pursuit of this great aim, he did not satisfy himself with saying, as he might, that this was the very aim of all the best men of his race in bygone times. He did not take shelter in this way, as he might, from the enemies whom he soon provoked by his plain speech, and who ultimately had him crucified. The utterances of the wise, the prophets and saints of old, frequently came to his lips, but he did more than echo them. There was one truth which men needed then, and which they need now, and which they will always need; and never is it needed more than when they turn to some great utterance of the past, whether from the lips of Moses, or any other prophet, even of Jesus himself. It is this truth—that the very same Eternal Wisdom that made the teachers of old time wise, and quickened them into fuller life, is the quickener and inspirer of their faithful scholars, also,

down to the latest generation. It was a feeling of this truth that particularly distinguished the teachings of Jesus. He 'spoke with authority,' they said; but his authority and confidence sprang not from any sense of his own importance, but because he felt that the Eternal One was with him, as much with him as ever with those of old time; and that whatever he tried to teach, in so far as it was true and good, was not his private property, but was the 'word' of his 'Father,' the Giver of life to every soul. And this feeling he tried to get all men to share, not only those who seek to teach the truth, but those who have any true work to do. However lowly they or their work may be, the Eternal One is near to them, their helper and their friend.

But how if men will not be true? How if they are untrue and do the things which they know to be wrong? Jesus felt, and Jesus taught that this was a terrible thing. He grew angry when he saw men hardening their hearts and pretending to be good when they were evil. He felt and taught that the result of evil-doing must always be misery and shame; no one could be sterner than he to the shame-

less and impenitent. But he also felt and taught that the Eternal One was not only the source of all truth of intellect, but of all truth of feeling, and that the pity he himself felt for those who were really struggling against evil things and trying to be better was as much a token of Eternal Love as the wondrous beauty of the lily was a token of the Eternal Wisdom.

So Jesus never wearied of telling people to look to God as a Father, to trust Him, to turn from their evil ways and serve Him with pure affection and with grateful and hopeful minds. Yes, even though their consciences accused them of many sins, if they would seek God their Father in a right spirit and trust His pardoning love, they would find how infinitely greater Divine Pity is than the saddest and deepest human need. What was this right spirit in which the penitent should seek forgiveness? It was a spirit so free from the self-will and self-indulgence out of which every sin springs that he who feels it gives himself to God in perfect simplicity, becoming humble and docile as a little child is with a parent felt to be strong and wise and tender; above all the right spirit grudges no one, is hard and vindictive to no one, but kind and forgiving to

all. Here Jesus was insisting on a rule in life which is shown in many ways, viz., that as your heart is so your world is; as you measure, it is measured back to you; as you give good, or try to do so, you get good, the best good of all, for you grow good yourself.

But Jesus knew that to live in this right spirit would sometimes involve painful self-sacrifice. He did not flinch from that consequence; on the contrary he faced it openly himself and taught men to do the same. For he felt that the best love, the love most like God's love, is the love that gives itself freely, without calculating the reward; it is a love that does not shrink to spend and be spent even for the unworthy, even for the unkind and ungrateful. It seemed in his day, and it still is, a hard lesson for men to learn. Everyone can see that beautiful things are good to get and enjoy, and wise and clever things are good to know; and when teachers show us these things we gladly follow their instruction. But to give up pleasant things, to suffer wrong and still be patient, to live a life of service, and if need be to yield up our very life for others—this is not easy. Jesus himself did all this; he did not say it was easy. On the contrary,

it was evidently very hard even to him at times, just as it is hard sometimes, if not always, for us.

But Jesus did it. His life taught no less than his words. He humbled himself; he was 'lowly of heart'; so that people with whom no one else would care to speak found him a willing listener and sympathiser. Some of his chosen friends and companions, with their minds full of hopes for the great and glorious age that was thought to be coming, began to believe that he would be the great prince of the 'kingdom.' But he seems to have felt for a long time before his death, that if he was indeed the Christ, the 'anointed one' whom his people expected, it would be only as a suffering Christ, faithful unto death, that he would really lead them and mankind towards God and His spiritual kingdom; and in a way that seems strange, but is quite unmistakable, his self-surrender and his martyr-death have blended with the influence of his teaching and wisdom and holy character; so that ever since then men have spoken of him with deepest tenderness as well as reverence, and they who have tried to learn his lessons of trust and faithfulness and self-

surrender,—millions upon millions of disciples, —would rather look upon his face hereafter— if God in His goodness will have it so—than on the face of any other of this world's greatest leaders, heroes, and kings.

If you also thus cherish the memory of Jesus; and if you cannot find anywhere a more helpful thought of the world, and of your part in it, than his who tells you that the Eternal One loves you and longs for your love as the parent longs for the love of the little child, and is glad when you turn with love and trust to Him as the parent is when the little one begins to show its affection; if you remember his teaching, that religion is truly the simplest, most natural feeling to the awakened mind, your life will become more and more blessed as you dwell upon these thoughts. It will become daily a happier, because more helpful, life. 'The Father who seeth in secret' will become known more perfectly as your great companion and friend; and you will understand more clearly and sweetly the meaning of prayer, the speech of your soul with Him.

If you remember Jesus and his teachings

you will also be protected from many mistakes and snares into which men are apt to fall when they come under the influence of the later Christian traditions and usages. Jesus never said you must go to a priest and confess to him in order to gain forgiveness through him. He did not encourage men to be careful to worship God with elaborate ceremonies or to practise a multitude of minute observances. His teachings were really against that kind of thing. He never taught people to believe that some day after his death, the priests would be able to change a piece of bread into his body, and that they must adore this piece of bread if they were his disciples. Nor did he teach men that God was so angry with them as sinners that He would only forgive them if he should die in their stead upon the cross. That idea of sacrificial substitution is one that belongs to the system of the ancient religions, out of which men ought long ago to have grown, and would have grown, if they had kept true to his teachings. Assuredly there *is* help for the world in the death of its saints. Jesus doubtless felt that even his saddest hour, whether in Gethsemane where he was betrayed, or on Calvary where he was crucified, would in some way

under God's providence bless mankind. It has blessed mankind, deeply and most truly. But nothing would be less in accord with his teaching than to look upon his death as an offering to an angry God. Beware, he would surely say, of thinking that the sacrifice of another can make up to God for your wrong-doing. It can only help you if it draws you also into the self-sacrificing spirit, if it opens a great new insight into the divine Pity, the eternal Love, and so leads you towards the divine help that can redeem even you from sin and shame and death.

And one more point in which the followers of Jesus have often differed from their leader is this,—they have drawn up a set of beliefs into an official creed, and they have driven out of their fellowship anyone who could not profess agreement with it. Not only so, but at some periods of Christian history the bitterness between the supporters of rival creeds has grown into active violence and cruel persecution. The world would not have seen these shocking things if the followers of Jesus had remembered the real spirit of his teaching. He tried to unite men in brotherly sympathy and common deeds of goodness, and according to the fourth

Gospel he said in the clearest manner possible, 'By this shall men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another.' How different such a broad fellowship, such a real brotherhood of souls, is from the system of rival ecclesiastical institutions—some of them rivalling the courts of princes—which has grown up within Christendom! Happy are they who realise the meaning of his message to mankind in a simpler and more spiritual way than this; who try to show their discipleship by imitating his example of lowly service and self-sacrifice; and who seek, not the honours and dignities of this world, but to be perfect in character as their 'Father in heaven' is perfect. To grow towards this perfection, Jesus assures us, is the object of our existence. It is this that the world around us is meant to help, teaching us wisdom by its parables, its beauty, its wonders, its constant laws, and by its trials and perplexities too. And the best part of his teaching is that not only is the whole world our educator, but that the God who gave us life, loves us always, and will help us always, if we will be helped, to grow more like Himself, wiser, truer, stronger, and more beautiful spirits, as the offspring of the eternal Spirit.

V.—THE WORLD'S SACRED BOOKS.

NEXT to the influence of the living teacher in the world, and in some respects more wonderful than the direct effect of his speech, is the influence of books which record his teaching. How strange it is that by the aid of a few marks on paper we can convey to men in far distant places and times, not only pictures of things, but the thoughts and feelings of the invisible mind! By this power of preserving the knowledge of one generation for the service of another, books have become the most important of all aids to human progress. When we learn to read we are taking advantage of this wonderful instrument, and enriching ourselves from the experience of men of the past. When we learn to write we are practising the use of a tool by which we may ourselves help and influence unnumbered lives in the future. Whether we deal with the common things of daily life or the sublimer

conceptions of poets and philosophers, we thus enter into what is really a most mysterious intercourse with men of all the ages. Euclid leads us on through the steps of geometry, Homer and Virgil impress and delight our minds with their poetry, despite the lapse of years since their death. It is so with regard to science, history, commerce, and government. What we call the 'dead past' is not truly dead but keeps on acting in many ways upon the present. Amongst these ways literature certainly takes a leading place.

It cannot surprise us then that the Christian religion has always been closely dependent upon its literature. When we come together for worship we seek to benefit, not only by words specially prepared for the occasion, but by others that preserve the high thoughts of the great and good who have passed away. Our emotions are kindled by the record of theirs. They, 'being dead, yet speak.' Our hymns, and chants, and lessons, and prayers thus bind us into union with the souls that first breathed them. From how vast a field this rich harvest of devotional utterance has been gathered! If at any time we are tempted to be narrow and bigoted in our religious views, the fact that we

sing the hymns and benefit by the wisdom of men who belonged to widely different churches and races of mankind ought to rebuke all such unworthy thoughts. Freely we have received from the soul-experience of others ; freely and generously let our sympathies go forth towards all who in any way are seeking to be good and to do the right.

I think if we understand the real nature of the book which is used above all other books in our religious culture we shall be led more and more into this broad fellowship of souls. For we learn from the Bible, not only in many a direct exhortation to generosity of sympathy and charitableness of judgment, but also in the very facts of its composition and history, that the Eternal One may be named in many ways, and may be sincerely and reverently worshipped in different temples ; and that, in the progressive experience of mankind to which the Bible bears testimony, each name and rite in its time may serve the needs of religious people. Amidst all its lessons, and it has many that are dear and precious to every understanding mind, let the Bible—the great book of our religion—always remind us of this. It will then point the way to the best use of the many aids

which God has provided for us in the shape of literature; and it will make us ashamed of a contented ignorance as to the true history of the world, and still more ashamed of narrowness of sympathy and sectional prejudice. If we understand the Bible's growth at all properly it will remind us that the life of our own mind is also a growth, that he who is wisest is most willing to learn more; and we shall gratefully receive all that helps towards the better and richer character we are here to seek.

Now, you who value the Bible; who find many of its stories, though familiar, ever interesting, its poetry beautiful and sublime, its exhortations stimulating, and its moral precepts like grains of salt to keep the mind pure and wholesome; you who know (as I trust you do) that the more wisely this old literature is studied the more profoundly suggestive and important it becomes, must not be surprised, when you look towards other forms of religious culture in the world, to discover that these also possess their 'sacred books.' It would have been strange, surely, had it been otherwise. The art of writing has

been known in some degree for many ages, wherever men have been at all civilized — indeed, it is doubtful whether without the use of this art in some degree there could really be any true civilization at all. However that may be, it is certain that in connection with each of the greatest forms of religious culture there has grown up a body of literature which has come to have special value and authority among the respective members of the different religious communities.

Thus the Mohammedans cherish their *Koran* no less loyally than Christians cherish their Bible. This 'sacred book' is not so large as the Bible, though the latter contains, we must remember, the sacred writings both of the Jews and of the Christians in one volume. It differs very much in other respects from the Bible; for it was written in great part, if not wholly, by one man, — Mohammed himself; whereas the Bible had many authors, some of whom lived, probably, a thousand years apart. Besides, the Koran is little more than twelve centuries old, and is in fact much the newest of the world's 'sacred books.' Its contents are, in general, quite in accord with what we know of the strange

mystic, the earnest and sometimes fierce Arab prophet who wrote it. They consist of discourses, exhortations, visions, allegories, and similar materials, set before the reader mostly in short sections or chapters. Strangely bewildering as such a book must be to us upon the first glance, and needing much careful study before we can claim really to know it, we cannot doubt its religious effect amongst races of men who have left no mean mark on the history of the world. It is venerated as earnestly by Mohammedans as the Bible is by Christians; and care is taken to have it read through regularly in the mosques just as the greater part of the Bible is read through in the churches of England.

If we travel in thought through Persia on our way to the home of the most voluminous sacred books of the world we may at some point in our journey find ourselves amongst the disciples of that 'prophet of industry,' Zoroaster, of whom mention has been made in a previous section of our study. These, too, have their 'sacred book,' or, rather, a collection of remnants of scriptures which have come down from a very remote period indeed. So

old are these fragments of Zoroastrian scripture that the language in which they were written is quite obsolete, and it is only through its interpretation in the Zend language, itself an ancient speech, that it is now preserved. Students tell us that some of its contents are probably a thousand years later than the oldest portions, so that it represents, like our Bible, the literary growth of a vast period. Only a scanty remnant remains of the once large religious community who used this sacred book, and it is little more than a hundred years since the secret of their scriptures was discovered by a young Frenchman and published to the Western world. Even now it is confessedly uncertain how it should be translated in parts; but it is enough for our present purpose to say that, amid much that is strange, and even repellent, to the Christian mind, it contains devout hymns and prayers, and many a lofty exhortation.

But when we go farther eastward into India, we come to a land where sacred writings abound and are abundantly cherished and expounded. The representatives of the more ancient Indian religion, the Vedic, have a

literature which far exceeds in bulk our Old and New Testaments. The Vedic hymns which hold the most exalted place in this literature are really not very bulky themselves; but the commentary on them, which is regarded as authoritative, is much larger than the contents of our Bible; and there are three other Vedas, dealing more particularly with worship, which with their dependent treatises make up a very large collection, indeed. And besides these, again, there are copious law-books and epic poems which are held sacred in some degree, though the Vedas are supreme. Clearly this Hindoo, or Brahminic religion has a very substantial Bible of its own.

But that is only one of the Indian religions. The Buddhistic religion, which as we have seen, grew out of an attempt to reform Brahminism, possesses a sacred literature which is said to have nine or ten times the bulk of the Biblical writings. Such vast collections represent the accumulated labour of centuries. They preserve stories and traditions, laws and precepts, prayers and hymns, many of them very suggestive and profound, that have sprung forth from the religious life and teaching of many generations.

And even yet there are two other forms of religious culture which deserve mention as having gathered around a sacred literature. They belong to China, that strange land, where after having long advanced beyond other races in the arts of civilization, the people have for centuries made little progress, and their empire is now evidently crumbling to pieces. It was the lot of Confucius, as we have seen, to win vastly more influence over his countrymen after his death than while he still lived. His sayings were preserved in writing, and along with the commentaries and interpretations of his more gifted followers they form to-day a number of bulky volumes. Still more remarkable as an example of the growth of a sacred scripture is that connected with the name of Lao-tse, the founder of 'Taoism,' one of the popular religions of China. This teacher, who lived nearly as long ago as Confucius, wrote (it is said) many works, but to only one of these—the 'Tao-te-King'—was assigned the supreme authority. This book is only about five thousand words long, about a third of the length of the Gospel of Mark. If the Tao Scripture had been restricted to this it would have been by far the smallest 'sacred book' in

the world. But, as was inevitable, it has received fresh interpretations from time to time as its original language became more antique; and so a huge body of commentary has been growing around the central work for more than 2000 years.

I must not here attempt to describe these 'sacred books' in detail. Anyone who is in earnest about the matter will find abundant help towards learning more of their nature and contents. I may particularly recommend to notice the valuable series of translations edited by Professor Max Müller under the title of 'The Sacred Books of the East.' Let me, however, add a few words to what has already been said on religious scripture in general.

It is quite clear that there is a great variety in the value of such writings. The student of history and of the growth of ideas will not, indeed, cast any of them aside as worthless and uninteresting. But to ordinary people there is much in them that is quite unprofitable. This remark applies, of course, more distinctly to the 'sacred books' of those races whose manners of life and thought are greatly

different from ours; but it is also true that in the Bible itself there are portions which have no spiritual value for most people, even if anybody at all can get profit out of them. Speaking of the books as a whole, as far as my knowledge goes, I cannot find any religious literature at all comparable in interest and influence to the Bible. I cannot discover any life and teaching that affect me like those of Jesus Christ. That is probably true of most of us, if not all, who have been accustomed to the Bible from childhood. But if a pious member of an oriental race should feel similar preferences in connection with his own religion it would be very unbecoming in us to show scorn or anger towards him. Let us, after all, remember that the real matter for us to consider is not which sacred literature ranks highest; if it were, we should need a great deal more knowledge on this wide subject than most of us will ever gain. The important thing for us is that while we hear with interest about other, but remoter, sources of religious teaching, we should know well that invaluable help which God in His providence has brought home to us, so that we may profit by it.

By 'knowing the Bible well,' I do not

mean a familiarity with its contents without an intelligent understanding of their meaning. I mean such a knowledge as can only be acquired by studying it with a mind free from prejudice, as well as with a heart quick to feel the life that glows in its records and appeals. It has been well said that he who tries to know the Bible and that alone, cannot know it at all, for it has its place in the midst of many things which help to make it intelligible to us. One of these things is the widespread growth of sacred scriptures which I have just tried to illustrate. When we understand this, we are better able to judge of the different values of those portions of the Bible which came into being at different stages of its growth; and we are better prepared to study it patiently, not as an oracle, but as a story of the spiritual life of many generations.

The great scholar to whose works I referred a little time ago has wisely said that the study of the religions of the world, as shown in their sacred writings, puts to shame the unchristian notion, once prevalent, 'that all the nations of the earth, before the rise of Christianity, were mere outcasts, forsaken and forgotten of their Father in heaven, without a

knowledge of God, without a hope of salvation.' Surely no such idea will ever come into our minds after having glanced even thus briefly at the facts of the world's religious life. The same writer also urges the reflection I have just suggested as to the help which such a study gives the mind in getting rid of the 'artificial and unhistorical theories of the last three centuries' about the Bible. If we employ the same 'charitable and reasonable' ways of dealing with it that we should feel to be right in regard to any other writings, we shall be freed from many of those bewildering contradictions of the heart's best instincts that have troubled anxious but uninstructed readers in the past.

These time-honoured pages, rich in venerable and tender associations, as well as rich in themselves, were truly 'written for our learning' that through their comfort 'we might have hope.' If we have ears to hear they will bring us voices of the world's best and holiest, bidding us be faithful as long as we live. And who will not be faithful with such voices to guide him? In a world where this marvellous process of growth is carried on, from generation to generation, from soul to soul, we cannot

but feel very sure that goodness and the spiritual life are no mere accidents or passing fashions. They are that for which the world of mankind exists; and He who has helped mankind thus far on its way will be the Helper and Friend of every one of us for ever.

VI.—OUR AIMS AND HOPES.

WE come now to the concluding section of our study, the purpose of which is to set forth more fully than hitherto the aims and hopes which we cherish as a religious people. We have, in the earlier sections, considered the religious side of the world's life as it is presented in the different forms of worship adopted by mankind, in the teachings and writings held in highest esteem for their religious value, and especially in the teachings of Jesus and the Bible. If we have done so to advantage we should now be better able to complete the sketch of the meaning of our religious movement than we were when we traced the lines that mark off our Church from others. We shall see, I trust, as we proceed, that separated as we may be from others, it is only as one part of an army is separated from the rest—not that it may oppose the rest in regard to the main object which it has in view, but to

fulfil some special duty which the general-in-command has assigned to it. May not ours be an advance-guard, to lead the way for a stage further onwards in the progress of mankind?

We have seen, in a general view, that all religious movements represent growth. The course of Christian history at large, and the story of our own special share in it, are subjects of the greatest interest and importance; but they must be studied in detail at some other time. It is enough, for the present, to assure ourselves that our movement is not the result of any sudden revolution, still less of personal caprice. For centuries, ever since the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, —and, we may justly say, since long before—it has been growing, though at times almost imperceptibly; and, as greater liberty and wider knowledge have prevailed, its principles have found their way more freely into men's minds. I believe they are now much more generally held by thoughtful people than is sometimes supposed; but there is much, very much, to be done before the whole reform at which we aim is accomplished even in this land of enlightened Christianity. If there is real life in our movement it will grow and increase in power to do good.

The temples and churches of the world are the fruit of the experience of mankind; but fruits contain seeds, and living thoughts are seeds for the use of ages to come. We hope that ours may be a religious movement from which much good will spring in the future. All earnest people cherish such hopes. As we listen to the voices of the world's wisest and best we hear them one by one bidding their brethren, not only to hold fast that which is good, but to strive after the better things that lie before them. In one way or another they all teach us to echo the prayer—'Thy Kingdom come.' That is the note, especially, of these Scriptures, Old and New; it is the leading idea of Christian worship; it comes to us most simply and directly in the words of Jesus Christ. When we also, in our turn, take the prayer for the coming kingdom as a motto peculiarly suitable for our Church and movement, we are thus in complete accord with the greatest leaders of humanity. If there is anything new in our teaching, at any rate our eagerness to press on to better things, to be pioneers of the world's progress, is not at all new. It is the oldest impulse of religion, and it cannot die.

For, whatever gave mankind the notion, human creatures have come to believe fixedly, and we also believe, that there are better things to come than have ever yet been seen or known. To-day men may see and know much, but they are destined to know more. Entrancing beauty has been discovered by mortal eyes, but beauty as yet undreamed of will unfold hereafter before men's brighter and clearer vision. Men have become rich in intellect, wise in heart, splendid in character, as the infinite Soul Supreme has drawn human souls towards His own divineness; but still there is room to grow, for nothing short of perfection is the goal of our existence. And whatever gave mankind this notion, it was clearly not given in vain. It is the mainspring of all that is worthiest and manliest in human action; it is the thought that affords anchorage to our minds amidst the disturbing trials and sorrows of life. There is a Kingdom of God which is to come more and more amongst us in the world, to come more and more into our own lives, and to make us blest beyond all that has ever been known. It is to realise that longing, to fulfil that prophecy of our souls, that we unite as worshippers, as workers, as

students of the truth, and as upholders of Our Faith amongst men.

Now, it would be as foolish to enter upon any such task without definite aims, as to embark upon the ocean without chart, compass, or destined haven. Let us therefore in this last part of our study, try and make clear to ourselves what our aims are as a body of earnest people who wish to be not only earnest but also intelligent in all things, and especially in a matter which goes, as religion does, to the very centre of our life. What exactly do we mean when we say we are united to promote the Kingdom of God?

We mean nothing short of the *spiritualizing* of mankind. At present there is but too much evidence that men are not spiritualized. The animal propensities, the animal darkness of mind, are sadly too much in possession of multitudes; and in multitudes more, where the dawning of higher and nobler life has begun, its progress is still very greatly hindered. Our Church aims at rousing the minds of all to a full sense of their moral responsibility. It seeks to unveil to men their true nature, which too frequently is hidden or neglected. Every

human soul is in some measure responsible; there are clear and inevitable laws of conduct to be obeyed, and he who breaks these laws meets with an unerring penalty. Such is the testimony of all ages. We testify the same thing.

I fear, however, it has been the custom of many religious people to speak of the exaction of this penalty for sin in terms that eventually mislead. In one direction they have erred in leading men to think of the penalty for sin as postponed, for the most part, to an indefinite future. They have, indeed, pictured most terrible scenes of future punishment; but experience shows that these pictures of distant retribution have but little influence on very many minds.

We aim at bringing home to men the certain truth that every wrong is an injury to the wrong-doer, and to quicken their consciousness of the undeserved pain and injury their wrong-doing brings upon others. We are so made that to sin is to poison the springs of our mind's life. We are so bound together in families, and in society at large, that to sin is to rob our brethren of the service and blessing which they have a right to expect from us.

Be assured, He who made us meant us to obey, to be pure, to be honest, to be just, to be merciful; and the sad state of things in the world, the shame, the degradation, and a great part, certainly, of the disease and privation of the world, arise from the neglect, the selfishness, and the wickedness of men.

No wonder that sensitive souls, feeling a natural anger at those who are guilty in this way, have declared that He who has made these laws must also be angry with His disobedient children. This thought, however, points to another direction in which, it seems to me, many noble-hearted teachers have gone astray. I do not say—for who can say what the divine nature feels?—I do not say that there is nothing in the Eternal One answering to the righteous wrath of a noble soul against the wilful sinner, against the man who spurns the voice of his conscience, and flings his whole nature into iniquity. Let him who hardens his heart beware; let everyone beware of 'grieving'—as the apostle says—'the Holy Spirit of God.'

But all who wish to win men's souls to the love of goodness and justice and mercy must themselves beware of forgetting that divine

justice is just but never vengeful, and that He who teaches us in many ways that we ought to try to 'overcome evil with good' can never cease to be good and merciful Himself. One very distinct aim of our religious movement is, —while we teach the certainty of a divinely ordained penalty for wrong doing, — to reassure all those who have been shocked and revolted by the doctrine of an everlasting hell, in which human creatures are to be tortured for ever. No such doctrine is ours. We proclaim a gospel of all-triumphant Love, not of half-defeated Love. We aim chiefly at recalling men to a sense of a divine Pity that willeth not the death of a sinner but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. We aim at showing men that the penalty for broken law is a warning, stern but salutary, that they can only obtain blessedness through obedience. We feel that the divine Goodness is most good in ordaining this to be so. We strive to win men to the right side by showing how beautiful it is, how their faithfulness in duty blesses all around them, and enables them to see and to enjoy the grace and glory of an existence of which a faithful Friend is the indwelling Spirit.

We aim at the perpetual preservation of the sweet and wholesome influences that stream from life to life through the generations, helping men to live upright, useful, and happy lives. It is this contact of soul with soul in parent and child, in teacher and scholar, in preacher and listener, in all forms of earnest intercourse between us, that most powerfully sustains the flow of the spiritual life-currents of this world. Hence above all things we aim in our Church to develop a fellowship that shall extend and deepen the lives of all who belong to it; we aim at holding up an ideal of character which shall animate all to ever-renewed faithfulness and aspiration; and we aim at building up such an altar of true and heartfelt worship that we may continually glow with the warmth of devout and holy affection towards God and all souls around us.

I have said that in this religious movement of ours we aim at *spiritualizing* the life of men. It follows that we oppose all that tends to debase and materialize the life of men. In the old story of the return of the captive Hebrews to the land of their fathers we are told that, as

they built up the ruined walls of Jerusalem, they kept their swords ready to hand, to fight for life and liberty against their jealous foes. We also must be ready to fight against the enemies of the spiritual City of God which we are labouring to build. We fight against every custom that enslaves men's minds, against every vice that ruins their bodies or wastes their wealth. We oppose the greed, the thoughtless ambition of the strong and fortunate, through which the weaker members of human society are trampled down or deprived of a just share of the common blessings of life. We oppose the gloomy thoughts that depress many of our brethren, for such thoughts ought to have no place in a world of which the Eternal One is our Friend and Helper. And we oppose the exaggerated love of pleasure which deludes many more, especially in our great cities; for such a passionate desire for excitement and selfish enjoyment corrupts the mind, and leads men to neglect their duties, and so to miss all that is most manly while they pursue the deceptive bubbles of folly. In a word, we join with good men everywhere to oppose the common foes of man's higher nature, the

temptations which have been *proved* evil by countless generations, but which still have deadly power over the unwary and those who do not exercise themselves unto godliness,—who forget that 'the price of liberty,' whether of the mind, or of the nation, 'is eternal vigilance.'

But we, who hold this faith in God as the Eternal Friend of all souls, especially resist everything that tends to materialize *religion.* It is to us one of the saddest things to see Christian men and women forsaking the way of their great Leader, and imposing upon one another yokes and restrictions which are entirely alien to the divine sonship which he would have us share with him. He declared, in the face of the authoritative teachers of religion in his day, that the 'Sabbath,'—that specially holy institution of the Jewish people,—was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. The principle of that saying applies to all things which, having been devised for the use of religion, may be perverted into a hindrance and a snare. Sacred places, sacred times, sacred ceremonies, sacred persons, all may serve the soul that feels their sacredness; but to limit religious worship by them, or to

assign a paramount authority to the priest, is treason to the sovereign rights of the soul itself. These and all such things were made for man,—the convenient house of prayer, the accepted order of ritual, the trained teacher and guide; but man was not made for them. Hence we oppose everything that would fetter the reason and burden the conscience of mankind. We oppose every claim to infallibility on the part of priest, or church, or pope, or book, or council. We believe the same Eternal Friend who educates men in respect to other things,—science, art, politics, commerce,—through the loyal and honest efforts of fallible minds, educates them through such efforts in the case of religious truth also. And so we do not aim at building up a spiritual despotism, but a brotherhood of free spirits, who claim no authority over each other in matters of conscience, but who help and are helped as God makes possible for them.

With such aims and hopes we gather together for worship; and we remember that the name by which we are known as religious people is borne by others who meet in similar places of worship throughout the land. We

cherish, indeed, respect and sympathy for all good and earnest men; yet it cannot be but that we and they whose aims are more directly the same, and who fight against the same foes of spiritual religion, should feel drawn together into special sympathy. If we and they are in earnest, if we do not gather into our respective places of worship as a matter of selfish enjoyment or interest, we must desire that our sense of the duty we share with each other shall grow and strengthen. I believe it is growing; but I believe also that one reason why this glorious faith of ours does not win its way more evidently in the land is that too many of us do not feel how glorious it really is, or how much need there is for unity and mutual encouragement in so great a cause.

Do we really desire that the Kingdom of God should come, that men should live and grow as immortal spirits, that ignorance and violence and degradation should be banished from human society by the incoming of truth and righteousness and all the noble virtues of the soul? Do we really feel that the Kingdom of God *has* been coming, more and more, age after age, as mankind has emerged from the infant stage and has been brought to under-

stand better what it means to be a living soul in the midst of this world; and that the same process of advance is *certain* if men will still be as earnest as were the great and good of past generations through whose efforts we are blessed to-day? If we really feel and desire these things, if parents and teachers and children and scholars and brethren and citizens day by day recall the meaning of life, and act as people who are true and reasonable, not to say devout and grateful, surely the Kingdom of God will come, and His will shall be done on earth, 'as it is in heaven.'

In those last words we reach the point where the greatest hope of Our Faith finds expression. Sometimes, when men are burdened and blinded by distress of body and mind, this greatest hope can find but trembling utterance. But when we are strongest in mind and heart, when we are manliest, most reasonable, most trustful, most loving, we feel most surely that the Eternal Friend has not helped human souls thus far simply that they may rise from the dust and sink into the dust, and that a dead planet shall be at last the only issue from the strivings of creation. When we are most

loving, most reasonable, we trust most securely the divine Reason and the divine Love. The Father on this earth, where we grow in body and mind, is felt to be the Father in 'heaven,' where the spirit, the very meaning of our being, lives on and grows towards His own likeness for ever. This is the crowning prophecy of our nature, the comfort of our saddest hours, the inspiration of our supremest labours, the consecration of our energies to things that are true and lovely and right; for who, that compares any tempting thing with the eternal glory of a spirit living for ever in accord with God, will shrink from fighting the evil thing, and not brave the worst of its temporary threats? Let us look forward confidently, however quietly and modestly, to the greater things that are to be, and shape our life as those who live for eternity. It is thus that souls become strong, heroic, saintly; and it is thus that the citizens and worshippers on earth are rendered fit to inhabit the golden city of God, and to join in a fuller worship with the faithful men of every age and clime.

And so to you, the younger brethren and children of our household, who have been

mostly in my view in all this that I have said about 'Our Faith': to you, and such as you, upon whose courage and intelligence and fidelity the future of our religious movement rests: to you comes the appeal of all that is best in the past, and all that is best in the future. You are learning to know yourselves, your own wonderful powers and deep responsibilities; you are learning to know God through His influence on your mind and heart; you are learning to understand what religion is, and how earnestly the best men of all ages have tried to help others to grow in goodness and wisdom; you are learning to understand what Jesus meant when, although he knew the path of duty would bring sacrifice and trial, he called men to follow him. You cannot learn the whole of this at once, but some of it you know already, and you will know more if you are faithful and dutiful and true. Those to whom you look up for instruction and guidance will pass away, but your greatest Friend and never-dying Father will teach you and help you as really, and as wisely, as He has taught and helped the souls of your earthly parents, and those of bygone generations. Trust in Him, therefore; look to Him for guidance; be

ambitious to serve Him as good soldiers of the Kingdom. As you go on year by year, take your share joyfully and sincerely in this best of all human efforts; and, when you are men and women, help the next generation to understand and live for the same great Faith, and so to carry forward, towards universal victory, the warfare with ignorance and selfishness, and promote the reign of truth and immortal love.

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